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SUBJECT: National PDP Chair warns of potential coup,  
President replies

REF: A. LAGOS 2418 and previous

[1](#)B. LAGOS 2513

[1](#)1. Summary. A recent heated exchange of letters between President Obasanjo and the chair of his ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) has dominated press headlines. This rift has been brewing since the 2003 elections, and the current crisis in Anambra has aggravated it. PDP chair Ogbeh warns Obasanjo that the conditions in Nigeria are strikingly similar to the conditions that led to the fall of the Second Republic and subsequent military rule. This public airing of the PDP's dirty laundry may be an early indicator of the level of acrimony to come in the 2007 election cycle, assuming Nigeria's democracy makes it. End Summary.

[1](#)2. On December 6, Chief Audu Ogbeh, the National Chair of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), wrote a letter to President Obasanjo warning that Nigeria is "drifting in the same direction" as the failed Second Republic. Ogbeh claims the Ministers jailed by Buhari's government "were suspected to have stolen all of Nigeria's wealth." Today, he warns, "perception is reality and today we are perceived in the worst light by an angry, scornful Nigerian public." He tells Obasanjo that "the buck stops at your table" and calls on him to "act now and bring any, and all criminal, even treasonable, activity to a halt...We do not have too much time to waste." The consequence of a failure to act on the part of the President would be that "we can, either by omission or commission allow ourselves to crash and bring to early grief this beautiful edifice called democracy."

[1](#)3. The letter was specifically written to address the role of the President in the recent crisis in Anambra State (ref A). Despite the fact this crisis seemed to not progress beyond its initial burst of violence, the Nigerian public has remained engaged on this issue. A survey of 3 of the major newspapers (The Guardian, Vanguard, and This Day) in Nigeria for the period Dec 7-14 front page Anambra headlines. Of the major weekend newsmagazines, which attract readership through their sensational front covers, 2 (Newsweek and The Week) of the 4 featured Anambra stories.

[1](#)4. Obasanjo reacted to Ogbeh's letter on December 10 with a 14-page missive. While much of the letter catalogs the actions the President claims to have taken to manage the situation in Anambra, he takes personal aim at Ogbeh throughout. First, he opens by saying he is "amused and not surprised" by Ogbeh's letter. In his description of the Anambra crisis, Obasanjo points to several differences he has had with his party's national chair since the President's first term (1999-2003). Later, in a discussion of the July 2003 "resignation" of Governor Ngige, he says to Ogbeh, "unfortunately, as in many other instances, you failed to do what you should have done as the chief executive of the party and rather prefer to insult me not only as the President of the nation but also as the leader of the party you seem never to recognize or acknowledge." Of note, Obasanjo refers to the kidnapping of Governor Ngige and his coerced resignation as a "family affair" to be handled within the party and not as a criminal activity.

[1](#)5. On the specific matter of Ogbeh's comparison of the present conditions in Nigeria with those that led to the fall of Second Republic in 1966, Obasanjo has "taken judicial note of the ominous comparisons you made between a government in which you participated that was overthrown in a coup d'etat and this present administration. I wonder if that is your wish."

[1](#)6. Press reports since this exchange have highlighted the growing rift in the ruling party. A party caucus called over this feud has thus far been unable to take a firm stand on either side of the issue. The conflict in the party is between those who see Ogbeh's letter as an inexcusable public criticism of the President and those who accept the letter as the "bitter truth on the state of the nation which must be corrected to halt the slide of anarchy."

[1](#)7. The Anambra crisis is largely an internal party disagreement turned violent, and Edo State may not be far behind. In Edo, a PDP faction led by the Governor of Edo, Lucky Igbinedion, suspended the national chair of the PDP

Board of Trustees, Tony Anenih, the state PDP chair, and others from the state PDP. The Anenih-led faction then established a rival secretariat in Benin City. The National Working Committee (NWC) of the PDP meeting in Abuja over the Ogbeh crisis overturned this suspension on December 14. The All Nigerian People's Party (ANPP), the major opposition party, has seized on this additional example of intra-party conflict and has predicted that it is only a prelude of what is to come.

18. Comment: The crisis in Anambra seems to have inflamed the smoldering dissatisfaction of the general population with the performance of Obasanjo, and the regime seems to exhibit palpable fear for its ability to maintain control of the nation. While there have long been whispers of the possibility of a coup--and even a longing for military government by portions of the populace who have yet to experience the benefits of democracy--this is first time that possibility has been openly aired in the press. This change is disturbing and may portend future moves by the President to consolidate his power and marginalize or remove those he considers less than completely loyal to him.

19. Comment continued. Ogbeh is drifting away from Obasanjo and apparently toward VP Atiku, who is increasingly seen as Obasanjo's rival. According to one source, the decision had been taken by Ogbeh to go on the attack, hence the first letter. Believing that Obasanjo had already decided to remove him, he felt he had nothing to lose. This also shows more clearly the battle lines that may be drawn in the PDP, should Nigeria's democratic experiment survive until the 2007 election. End comment.

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